

# F&V Programs



## Employee Development Newsletter

### From the Deputy Administrator . . .

I hope you enjoyed the first issue of the Employee Development Newsletter, which provided information on resume preparation. This issue builds upon the last one by examining the job interview process. As I mentioned in the previous issue, many of our employees have indicated a desire to learn more about this topic, and I hope that these newsletters can fill that need by providing timely information that you will find useful. Workforce statistics show that many of our employees will soon become eligible for retirement. Accordingly, the information contained in this newsletter is being provided to assist our employees in preparing for future opportunities. Future issues of this newsletter will look at a variety of other topics, including health and wellness; mentoring, shadowing, and detail assignments; and IDP preparation.

**I'd also like to invite you to participate in something new—we will hold a one hour, live “web cast” that will allow employees to log in via computer**

**and ask questions to a group of panelists.** The panel will consist of four individuals with considerable knowledge of different aspects of the Federal hiring process: an Associate Deputy Administrator who has interviewed and hired many candidates; an APHIS Personnel Specialist who can answer questions regarding the Federal application process; and two individuals who have been actively involved in recruiting and hiring new employees. You will be able to read the panelists' answers in real time from your work computer via the Internet. If you're unable to participate in the Webcast, the complete text will be saved and posted on our F&V Intranet site so that you'll have the opportunity to go back and read the questions and answers that were posted by others. If you prefer, you can fax your questions prior to the start of the Webcast, and then read the responses later at a convenient time by referring to the text posted on the F&V Intranet. Questions can be faxed to 202.720.0016.

The topic for this Webcast will be the job search process, and can include questions about resume preparation, interviews, the Federal job application process, and the PEARS system, among others. For more information about this exciting event, please see page 6 of this newsletter.

As always, I'd like to have your feedback on this issue and on any other topics that may be useful for future issues—you can submit them to me electronically to our “comment box” found on the F&V Intranet site located at: <http://insideams.ams.usda.gov/fvintranet/fvindex.htm>.

Bob Keeney

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## What Happens During the Interview?

The interviewing process can be scary if you don't know what to expect. All interviews fit a general pattern. While each interview will differ, all will share three common characteristics: the beginning, middle and conclusion.

The typical interview will last 30 minutes, although some may be longer. A typical structure is as follows:

1. Five minutes—small talk
2. Fifteen minutes—a mutual discussion of your background and credentials as they relate to the needs of the employer.
3. Five minutes—asks you for questions
4. Five minutes—conclusion of interview

As you can see, there is not a lot of time to state your case. The employer may try to do most of the talking. When you do respond to questions or ask your own, your statements should be concise and organized without being too brief.

The typical interview starts before you even get into the inner sanctum. The interviewer begins to evaluate you the minute you are identified. You are expected to shake the interviewer's hand upon being introduced. Don't be afraid to extend your hand first. This shows assertiveness.

It's a good idea to arrive at least 15 minutes early. You can use the time to relax. It gets easier later. It may mean counting to ten slowly or wiping your hands on a handkerchief to keep them dry.

Many interviewers will begin the interview with some small talk. Topics may range from the weather to sports and will rarely focus on anything that brings out your skills. None-

theless, you are still being evaluated.

Interviewers are trained to evaluate candidates on many different points. They may be judging how well you communicate on an informal basis. This means you must do more than smile and nod.

The main part of the interview starts when the interviewer begins discussing the organization. If the interviewer uses vague generalities about the position and you want more specific information, ask questions. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the job and the company.

As the interview turns to talk about your qualifications, be prepared to deal with aspects of your background that could be construed as negative, i.e., low grade point average, no participation in outside activities, no related work experience. It is up to you to convince the interviewer that although these points appear negative, positive attributes can be found in them. A low GPA could stem from having to fully support yourself through college; you might have no related work experience, but plenty of experience that shows you to be a loyal and valued employee.

Many times interviewers will ask why you chose the major you did or what your career goals are. These questions are designed to determine your goal direction. Employers seek people who have direction and motivation. This can be demonstrated by your answers to these innocent-sounding questions.

When the interviewer asks, "Now do you have any questions?" it's important to have a few ready. Dr. C. Randall Powell, author of *Career Plan-*

ning Today, suggests some excellent strategies for dealing with this issue. He says questions should elicit positive responses from the employer. Also, the questions should bring out your interest in and knowledge of the organization.

By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions, you show the employer you are serious about the organization and need more information. It also indicates to the interviewer that you have done your homework.

The interview isn't over until you walk out the door. The conclusion of the interview usually lasts five minutes and is very important. During this time the interviewer is assessing your overall performance.

It is important to remain enthusiastic and courteous. Often the conclusion of the interview is indicated when the interviewer stands up. However, if you feel the interview has reached its conclusion, feel free to stand up first.

Shake the interviewer's hand and thank him or her for con-

sidering you. Being forthright is a quality that most employers will respect, indicating that you feel you have presented your case and the decision is now up to the employer. Afterwards, be sure to send a letter thanking the interviewer for his or her time and consideration.

During the interview, you may be asked some unusual questions. Don't be too surprised. Many times questions are asked simply to see how you react.

For example, surprise questions could range from, "Tell me a joke" to "What time period would you like to have lived in?" These are not the kind of questions for which you can prepare in advance. Your reaction time and the response you give will be evaluated by the employer, but there's no way to anticipate questions like these. While these questions are not always used, they are intended to force you to react under some stress and pressure. The best advice is to think and give a natural response.



## 10 Rules of Interviewing

Before stepping into an interview, be sure to practice, practice, practice. A job seeker going to a job interview without preparing is like an actor performing on opening night without rehearsing. To help with the interview process, keep the following ten rules in mind:

1. **Keep your answers brief and concise.**  
Unless asked to give more detail, limit your answers to two to three minutes per question. Tape yourself and see how long it takes you to fully answer a question.
2. **Include concrete, quantifiable data.**  
Interviewees tend to talk in generalities. Unfortunately, generalities often fail to convince interviewers that the applicant has assets. Include measurable information and provide details about specific accomplishments when discussing your strengths.
3. **Repeat your key strengths three times.**  
It's essential that you comfortably and confidently articulate your strengths. Explain how the strengths relate to the organization's goals and how they might benefit the potential employer. If you repeat your strengths then they will be remembered and—if supported with quantifiable accomplishments—they will more likely be believed.
4. **Prepare five or more success stories.**  
In preparing for interviews, make a list of your skills and key assets. Then reflect on past jobs and pick out one or two instances when you used those skills successfully.
5. **Put yourself on their team.**  
Ally yourself with the prospective employer by using the employer's name and products or services. For example, "As a member of \_\_\_\_\_, I would carefully analyze the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_." Show that you are thinking like a member of the team and will fit in with the existing environment. Be careful though not to say anything that would offend or be taken negatively. Your research will help you in this area.
6. **Image is often as important as content.**  
What you look like and how you say something are just as important as what you say. Studies have shown that 65 percent of the conveyed message is nonverbal; gestures, physical appearance, and attire are highly



influential during job interviews.

### 7. **Ask questions.**

The types of questions you ask and the way you ask them can make a tremendous impression on the interviewer. Good questions require advance preparation. Just as you plan how you would answer an interviewer's questions, write out specific questions you want to ask. Then look for opportunities to ask them during the interview. Don't ask about benefits or salary. The interview process is a two-way street whereby you and the interviewer assess each other to determine if there is an appropriate match.

### 8. **Maintain a conversational flow.**

By consciously maintaining a conversational flow—a dialogue instead of a monologue—you will be perceived more positively. Use feedback questions at the end of your answers and use body language and voice intonation to create a conversational interchange between you and the interviewer.

### 9. **Research the organization.**

Research will provide information to help you decide whether you're interested in working for the organization, and will provide important data to refer to during the interview.

### 10. **Keep an interview journal.**

As soon as possible, write a brief summary of what happened. Note any follow-up action you should take and put it in your calendar. Review your presentation. Keep a journal of your attitude and the way you answered the questions. Did you ask questions to get the information you needed? What might you do differently next time? Prepare and send a brief, concise thank you letter. Restate your skills and stress what you can do for the organization.

## Dressing for the Interview

In most business and technical job interviews, when it comes to your appearance, conservatism and conformity are in order.

While many companies have adopted the 'office casual' dress code, don't try to set new standards in the interview. When in doubt, it is better to be too conservative than to be too flashy. For men and women, a suit is the best bet. Here are some guidelines:

### MEN

A two-piece suit will suffice in most instances. Solid colors and tighter-woven fabrics are safer than bold prints or patterns. Bright ties bring focus to the face, but a simple pattern is best for an interview. (A tip for larger men: Use a double Windsor knot to minimize a bulky appearance.) Wear polished shoes with socks high enough so no skin is visible when you sit down and cross your legs.

### WOMEN

A suit with a knee-length skirt and a tailored blouse is most appropriate. Although even the most conservative organizations allow more feminine looks these days, accessories should be kept simple. Basic pumps and modest jewelry and makeup help to present a professional look. Pants are more acceptable now but are not recommended for interviews.

### Staying Within a Budget

For recent graduates just entering professional life, additions to wardrobes, or complete overhauls, are likely needed. Limited funds, however, can be an obstacle. Image consultant Christine Lazzarini suggests 'capsule wardrobing.' For example, by mixing and matching, she says, an eight-piece capsule wardrobe can generate up to 28 ensembles. Before shopping, Lazzarini advises establishing a budget, 50% of which should be targeted for accessories. For women, 'even a brightly colored jacket could be considered an accessory when it makes an outfit you already have look entirely different.'

The most important piece in any wardrobe is a jacket that is versatile and can work with a number of other pieces, according to one fashion expert. This applies to men and women. 'If

you focus on a suit, buy one with a jacket which may be used with other skirts or trousers,' says a women's fashion director for a major national retailer. 'Then add a black turtleneck or a white shirt. These are the fashion basics that you can build on.' A navy or black blazer for men can work well with a few different gabardine pants. Although this kind of ensemble would be just as expensive as a single suit, it offers more versatility.

One accessory recommended by company representatives is a briefcase. 'When I see one,' says one recruiter, 'it definitely adds to the candidate's stature. It is a symbol to me that the individual has done some research and that he or she is prepared.'

### A Final Check

And, of course, your appearance is only as good as your grooming. Create a final checklist to review before you go on an interview:

1. Neatly trimmed hair
2. Conservative makeup
3. No runs in stockings
4. Shoes polished (some suggest wearing your sneakers on the way to an interview and changing before you enter the interview site)

5. No excessive jewelry; men should refrain from wearing earrings

6. No missing buttons, crooked ties or lint

You want your experience and qualifications to shine. Your appearance should enhance your presentation, not overwhelm it.



## Questions to Ask Employers During an Interview

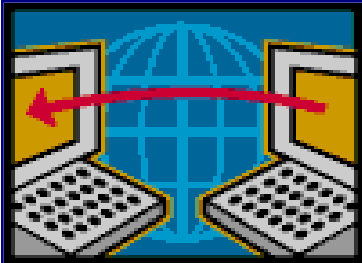
Towards the end of the interview, you are typically given the opportunity to ask questions of the employer. Experts agree that candidates should come prepared to ask a few good questions—but which ones? The following list provides some ideas that you may find useful:

1. What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
2. Does your organization encourage further education?
3. How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
4. What is the standard work schedule?
5. Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
6. What is the largest single problem facing your staff (department) now?
7. What do you like best about your job/organization?
8. Has there been much turnover in this job in the past?
9. What skills are especially important for someone in this position?
10. Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?
11. How much travel, if any, is involved in this position?
12. When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?

### TEN Steps to a Successful Interview

1. Arrive on time.
2. Introduce yourself in a courteous manner.
3. Read organizational materials while you wait.
4. Have a firm handshake.
5. Listen.
6. Use body language to show interest.
7. Smile, nod, and give nonverbal feedback to the interviewer.
8. Ask about the next step in the process.
9. Thank the interviewer.
10. Write a thank-you letter to anyone you have spoken to.

## Information on the Upcoming “Webcast” . . .



**Have questions concerning any aspect of the job search process?**

**Ask our panel of experts!**

**When: October 12, 2005 2:00—3:00 PM (Eastern Time)**

To Log on to the Webcast from your office computer, follow the instructions below:

**a. If your operating system is Windows 2000:**

Select: Start - Programs - Accessories – Communications- and then click NetMeeting (this will start the Windows 2000 NetMeeting setup process).

**b. If your operating system is Windows XP:**

Select: Start - Run - and enter “conf” then click OK. This will start the Windows XP NetMeeting setup process.

**Then configure the NetMeeting software:**

1. At the first screen select Next.
2. Enter your name and email address and select Next.
3. Select Next on the following screen (this will accept the default values, no changes are needed).
4. Select your connection speed and click Next
5. Choose to add a short cut or quick launch icon on this screen and then select Next.
6. Select Next at all of the Audio tuning wizard screens (there will be a total of 5 screens, ignore the requests to configure the speakers and microphone these are only needed for voice communication).

This completes the setup of NetMeeting. NetMeeting will automatically launch after you have completed the initial configuration. To place a call in NetMeeting, click on the call button and enter: **XPLWASHFV0630A**. This will connect your computer to the F&V Webcast.

If you need additional assistance, please consult with your system administrator.